

Subject: ancient Chinese banknote

Hummel, Arthur W.

1921

[Fenchow, Shanshi, China]

(Fenzhou, Shanxi, China)

AMERICAN BOARD MISSION
FENCHOW SHANSI, CHINA

227 E. College St.
Oberlin Ohio.
Dec. 8, 1921.

The American Numismatic Society,
Broadway and 155 Street,
New York City.

Dear Sirs:

I have in my possession an ancient Chinese banknote in good preservation, of the Hung Wu period of the Ming Dynasty, which I am willing to dispose of if I can get a reasonable sum for it. The Hung Wu period as you know dates from the years 1368-1396 A.D. and this, I understand is the oldest extant paper money in the world. This note is regulation size ($8\frac{1}{4} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$ inches). It has turned dark in color, as the mulberry tree paper of the Ming period always does, but the printing is quite legible, as are also the red and the black government seal marks, and the characters which give the date. A reduced fac simile of this note may be seen in Li Ung Bing's "Outlines of Chinese History" published by the Commercial Press Shanghai (page 227).

I secured this note in connection with my work as a missionary of the American Board Mission in Fenchowfu, Shansi province China. Fortunately I am able to trace in detail the exact source of this banknote. It was found in May 1920 in the image of the Chinese God of War (Kuan Ti) when his temple in northern Shensi province was being repaired. This temple is located in the suburb of the small city of Hsiang Shui Pu (响水堡) which is seventy li (23 miles) south of the more important city of Yu-lin-fu on the Great Wall. After its discovery this banknote passed into the hands of a local merchant named Mr. Hu, who sold it to me thru our Chinese preacher in that city. I was in this city four months after the note was found, and can vouch for the absolute genuineness of it. As you perhaps know, such valuables in images of Chinese temples are usually stolen before many years have elapsed, as the replastered holes in the chests of nearly all North China images testify. But this note, with a few others in poor preservation, lay in this image five and one half centuries, kept from decay by the dry climate of that region.

If your Society, or any of its members are interested in securing this banknote, please notify me at the above American address at your earliest convenience.

Cordially yours,

Arthur W. Hummel

December 16th, 1921

Arthur W. Hummel, Esq.
227 E. College Street
Oberlin, Ohio

Dear Sir:

In reply to your letter of December 8th, we are familiar with the Ming banknotes about which you write. A large roll of these came to light during the Rebellion, and I believe another lot was found later. I, personally, had twelve of these in my possession which I sold for \$200 Dollars each about ten years ago. I should say that today they are worth anywhere from \$10 to \$20 if you can find a purchaser. I have understood, however, that individual pieces in some instances have sold for quite large sums of money through a plausible story of the seller and lack of knowledge on the part of the buyer.

There are one or two of these notes still in New York being held, I think, at \$15 each.

Trusting the above information is satisfactory to you, I beg to remain

Very truly yours,

Curator

HW/E